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TAGS: [PREL](#) [SCUL](#) [KDEM](#) [AG](#)  
SUBJECT: ALGERIAN FOREIGN MINISTER BEDJAOUI CRITICIZES U.S.  
POLICY ON IRAQ, PALESTINIANS BUT WANTS MORE U.S. EDUCATION  
PROGRAMMING IN ALGERIA

Classified By: Ambassador Robert S. Ford; reasons 1.4 (b, d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: FM Bedjaoui and U/S Hughes agreed February 24 on the need to work in partnership with the U.S. in finding solutions to the problems of the region. While agreeing on the importance of fighting terrorism across borders, Bedjaoui and Hughes parted ways on how best to bring about viable solutions in Palestine and Iraq. Bedjaoui suggested that withdrawing U.S. troops and forcing the Iraqis to solve their own problems was the best way forward. Bedjaoui encouraged the U.S. to consider engaging parties like Palestinian Hamas that it did not like, drawing an analogy to the French not wanting initially to consider Algerian independence worthy of negotiation. Bedjaoui said bringing about democracy in the Middle East would take time but that education was vital to the process. End Summary.

ALGERIA OFFERS LITTLE ON IRAQ AND PALESTINIAN PROBLEMS  
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¶2. (C) Under Secretary Karen Hughes, accompanied by the Ambassador, NEA/MAG Director Elizabeth Hopkins and Embassy Pol/Econ chief (notetaker), called on Foreign Minister Mohamed Bedjaoui in Algiers February 24. Hughes described one of the major aims of her job as addressing the root causes of terrorism. She said the U.S. had much to learn from the Algerian experience in combating terrorism. Bedjaoui affirmed that Algeria's "long and bitter" struggle with terrorism had taught it that terrorism knew no borders. Algeria had also learned that it was equally vital to address social and economic ills in combating extremism.

¶3. (C) U/S Hughes asked Bedjaoui for Algeria's help and advice on Iraq and the Palestinian situation. Bedjaoui suggested that withdrawing U.S. troops and forcing the Iraqis to solve their own problems was the best approach. The Ambassador noted that withdrawing U.S. troops would increase, not diminish, the power of the militias in Iraq and hence increase the likelihood of sectarian strife. Bedjaoui cited the withdrawal of British troops as an indication that the situation in Iraq was getting worse and expressed disappointment that Iran now had more clout in the region than it had prior to the U.S. invasion. He told U/S Hughes the Administration should have taken more seriously the Baker-Hamilton Report, which encouraged U.S. engagement of Iran and Syria. Later over lunch, Bedjaoui decried the execution of Saddam Hussein, which he insisted was a quote political assassination end quote, had been done badly. Hughes said the Iraqi government had been responsible for the timing and manner of the execution but all should agree that Saddam was a dictator who deserved no sympathy personally.

¶4. (C) On the Palestinian situation, where Hamas did not recognize Israel's right to exist, Bedjaoui pointed out that many negotiations started from such circumstances. He cited

Algeria's own independence struggle as an example, noting that Charles DeGaulle of France did not initially recognize the need to negotiate with the Algerians on their independence. Hamas, continued Bedjaoui, won free and fair elections. Bedjaoui opined that over time Hamas would come to recognize Israel. The situation in Iraq, like that in Palestine, concerned everyone. Algeria joined the U.S. in the desire to find a settlement to both conflicts as soon as possible. It would be foolish and irresponsible now to blame the Americans for trying to find solutions to these problems, no matter what paths had been traveled to this point. Algeria, he said, would do its best to assist. (Comment: he offered nothing concrete, however. End Comment.)

#### EDUCATION VITAL TO MIDDLE EAST

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15. (C) The foreign minister offered the example of the African Union's Counterterrorism Center, located in Algiers, as an area of cooperation with the United States in advancing mutual interests -- in this case fighting terrorism in the Sahel. Hughes said the U.S. was indeed grateful for Algeria's cooperation in the fight against terrorism and sought to expand our cooperation, as partners, in economic and educational areas. Bedjaoui opined that he was one of relatively few Arab senior officials who carefully reads the annual UNDP reports on human development in the Arab world. The reports, he noted, made clear that the educational system in the 22 Arab countries was poor and dwindling. Without a push from outside, future educational development in the region faced bleak prospects. Bedjaoui said it was vital to overcome this educational deficit in the Arab world. Developing democracy, he observed, was a process of learning a culture through education.

16. (U) Under Secretary Hughes has cleared this message.

FORD